UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
7th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 20 October 1993
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/48/SR.7
8 November 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 83: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued) (A/48/46; A/C.4/48/L.2)

1. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) noted the valuable work being done by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), which had submitted a comprehensive report (A/48/46). It was essential for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the specialized agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and non-governmental organizations to continue to cooperate with UNSCEAR.

2. To reduce the real risk to man and the environment from atomic radiation, the large stockpiles of nuclear weapons had to be progressively dismantled and destroyed. Pakistan strongly endorsed the important steps already taken in that direction by the major nuclear Powers, just as it had consistently supported the early conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. Pending its conclusion, it would welcome a similar regional or bilateral agreement; and it had also put forward a number of proposals for establishing a nuclear non-proliferation regime in its own region.

3. If all nations were to benefit from the many useful peaceful applications of nuclear technology, close cooperation between States was essential. Both developed and developing countries could work together towards that common objective within a rational and equitable framework. Nuclear technology strictly for peaceful uses in the areas of energy, medicine, agriculture and other scientific fields must be shared if the developing countries were to prepare themselves for immediate and future challenges.

4. The world was facing the dual problems of shrinking energy resources and serious environmental degradation owing to the utilization of fossil fuels. Pakistan itself faced an acute shortage of conventional fuel and energy resources, as did many other States, which inhibited efforts to improve the lives of the people. The risk of proliferation could not be made a pretext for not sharing the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear technology with all peoples.

5. Equally important was the need to share nuclear-related safety technology and information, of which the Chernobyl disaster had been a sad reminder. It was the responsibility of the industrialized States that had exported nuclear reactors to developing countries to help them maintain them and to continue to provide vital spare parts. Despite the valid concern over nuclear non-proliferation, the requirements of proper maintenance and acceptable safety standards called for a more balanced and pragmatic approach. In that connection, IAEA was to be commended for taking the lead in ensuring the flow of safety-related information among States, a trend which should be fostered in the interests of all.

6. Mr. VERDIER (Argentina) observed that the depletion of the ozone layer in the southern hemisphere, an area of the world usually more sheltered from the effects of environmental contamination, had prompted wide-ranging debate in Argentina on environmental questions, including the effects of atomic radiation. There had been a broad public polemic over the possible transport of a plutonium

(Mr. Verdier, Argentina)

shipment through Drake Passage in the extreme south; and a number of environmental groups had decried the feasibility study done on the possible construction of a nuclear storage site in Patagonia.

7. Argentina added its voice to the strong international protests against the recent explosion of a nuclear device by China, which violated the moratorium declared by three other nuclear Powers and affected the current international climate favourable to the negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty.

8. The various bilateral and multilateral agreements signed by Argentina with its neighbours and with IAEA, and its observance of international guidelines for the export of nuclear materials, were proof of the exclusively peaceful aims of the Argentine nuclear plan. Its National Atomic Energy Commission was conducting an interesting programme for the use of radioisotopes in the fields of health, research, industry and agriculture and was expanding its safeguards programme to protect the population at large, nuclear-industry workers and the environment. It had therefore followed the successive UNSCEAR reports with great interest.

9. As a sponsor of the draft resolution on the item, Argentina urged its adoption by consensus.

10. Mr. HEINE (Marshall Islands), speaking on behalf of the States members of the South Pacific Forum, commended the excellent work being done by UNSCEAR and fully endorsed draft resolution A/C.4/48/L.2. The South Pacific region was still subject to a significant number of environmental threats like global warming and climate change, and the peoples of the region continued to be deeply concerned about the impact of atomic radiation arising from both atmospheric and underground nuclear testing.

11. The Forum countries were pleased to note that, as a result of the formal testing moratorium, until recently no nuclear tests had been conducted in the South Pacific for more than a year, and they remained committed to ensuring that there should be no resumption. At the twenty-fourth session of the South Pacific Forum, held in Nauru in August 1993, the Forum Heads of Government had once again addressed the issue of nuclear testing and published a communiqué which would be made available as document A/48/359. In it, the Forum countries warmly welcomed the decisions taken by the United States, the Russian Federation and France to extend their testing moratoria and urged that they should be maintained indefinitely, and they called on the other nuclear Powers to formally declare such moratoria. They welcomed the United States and French commitment to the early negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty and urged all the nuclear-weapon States to participate actively in the negotiations. The decision taken by the Conference on Disarmament in August 1993 to provide a negotiating mandate to its Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban was welcome.

12. Those promising developments, however, had been interrupted on 5 October by an underground nuclear test by China, which ran counter to the spirit of hope engendered by the forward-looking decisions taken by three of the nuclear-weapon States.

(Mr. Heine, Marshall Islands)

13. The Forum Heads of Government were also concerned about recent reports that nuclear wastes were being dumped in the North Pacific, contrary to the intent of the 1972 London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by the Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter. The nations and peoples of the South Pacific, furthermore, remained concerned about the possible dangers of plutonium shipments through the Pacific region.

14. The CHAIRMAN announced that Pakistan, Spain and Greece had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.4/48/L.2.

15. Draft resolution A/C.4/48/L.2 was adopted unanimously.

16. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of item 83.

AGENDA ITEM 89: SCIENCE AND PEACE (A/C.4/48/L.3)

17. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica), speaking also on behalf of the delegations of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, introduced draft decision A/C.4/48/L.3 on science and peace. Because the report from the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on activities by Member States and interested organizations in connection with the International Week of Science and Peace, which had been requested in the last General Assembly resolution adopted on the item, resolution 45/70, had never been submitted as requested, the draft decision would have consideration of agenda item 89 deferred until the forty-ninth session with a view to receiving that report of the Secretary-General. The importance of science as a factor for peace and the contributions that scientists could make to disarmament, peace, security, well-being and sustainable development could not be underestimated.

18. Draft decision A/C.4/48/L.3 was adopted unanimously.

19. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of item 89.

AGENDA ITEM 90: QUESTION OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE RELEVANT ORGANS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

20. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should defer consideration of the item until the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

21. It was so decided.

22. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 90.

23. In accordance with established practice, he suggested that the Committee should request the Rapporteur to submit the reports on the items just concluded directly to the General Assembly.

24. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 10.50 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
8th meeting
held on
Monday, 25 October 1993
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/48/SR.8
22 November 1993
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (A/48/21 and A/48/407)

1. Mr. VIANELLO-CHIODO (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information) said that it was now a challenging time for the United Nations, given its efforts to expand its activities and the new role it was expected to play in the international arena. President John F. Kennedy had stated that the United Nations was the last, best hope for mankind and that it would be necessary to create a new organization just like it, if it ceased to exist. However, it seemed difficult today to define what the world could or should expect from the world Organization. Member States viewed the United Nations not only as the principal forum for multinational dialogue, but also, as a unique instrument capable of mobilizing the international community with respect to conflict settlement, the cessation of armed conflict, the monitoring of democratic elections, the delivery of humanitarian relief, the protection of human rights, the preservation of the environment, and the advancement of social development and sustainable economic development, to name just a few of the priority issues on the agenda of the United Nations.

2. The United Nations was increasingly being called upon to provide aid on short notice; the demands on it were greater than its resources, and its shortcomings were glaringly highlighted. As a result, public support for the Organization was lacking at times in certain critical areas. However, what the Secretary-General described as the "chorus of demands to do something" showed that the time had come to match the entire world's expectations with the political will and the means to accomplish the tasks facing the Organization. The Department of Public Information must tackle that task to the best of its ability. That was particularly true at a time when the information revolution had turned communication - and thus, the media - into a new power which formed political realities by moulding public opinion. In meeting that challenge, the Department's strategy was to make its information programme more open than in recent decades and to strengthen advocacy on behalf of the United Nations. It was necessary to sustain the public's interest in the Organization and its activities and enhance its understanding of the responsibilities of the world body. Information programmes must be designed to seize every opportunity to shine the spotlight of world attention on the work which must be accomplished together to advance the cause of humanity. Communication must lead to a fruitful dialogue, which meant that information strategies should focus more on "communication" than on "supply". While the foundation of its activities would continue to be print, audio-visual, television and radio coverage of the activities of the United Nations, the Department of Public Information must at the same time redirect its efforts to gain public support for the Organization and its new responsibilities.

3. As was clear from the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/48/407), the Department of Public Information had made every effort to discharge the mandates entrusted to it by the General Assembly. Nevertheless, financial, administrative and bureaucratic constraints made that task extremely difficult. Far from being a luxury, flexibility was a prerequisite if the Department was to be able to respond rapidly to fast-breaking developments and, when necessary, to unwarranted criticism by some

(Mr. Vianello-Chiodo)

in the media. Upon joining the Department, one of his first challenges had been to discuss with the members of the Bureau and the enlarged Bureau of the Committee on Information how to restructure the Department and rethink its methods of work. The dissemination of information about the United Nations could not be separated from the necessary advocacy with the public, and the Department had adopted a more active approach in advocating the ideals and principles upon which the United Nations had been founded. It must take advantage of the excellent opportunities now available to breathe new life into them.

4. The Department of Public Information now comprised the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General and four divisions, namely, the Office of the Spokesman for the General Assembly, the Media Division, the Library and Publications Division and the Promotion and External Relations Division. The Department had absorbed the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and some parts of the former Publishing Division. Despite its added responsibilities, the Department had been able to streamline its structure, eliminate one D-2 post and reduce its staff by some 15 posts compared to the number envisaged at the start of the current biennium. The post of the head of the Department had been downgraded and was now at the Assistant Secretary-General level.

5. The Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General was now responsible for the news distribution services provided to senior Secretariat officials, in addition to its traditional functions of providing daily briefings to delegations and the media and providing information support to the Secretary-General. In addition to providing print and audio-visual coverage (press release, photographic, radio, television and film coverage and updates), the Media Division had absorbed the responsibility of providing media liaison and accreditation services. In addition to weekly television broadcasts, a new electronic bulletin board service had been created in September 1993 which enabled radio stations to receive over the telephone such information as the daily briefings by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, updates, statements and special reports. Users had expressed considerable satisfaction with the new service. The Library and Publications Division encompassed the library and publishing services transferred from the Office of Conference Services as well as the services responsible for the publication of the Yearbook of the United Nations, the UN Chronicle and Development Business. The transfer to the Division of certain publishing and research activities had proved beneficial for programme delivery. The 1988 and 1992 editions of the Yearbook of the United Nations would be issued by the end of 1993. The entire backlog would be cleared by 1995. Consideration was being given to improving the UN Chronicle and resuming publication of Development Forum.

6. As part of its mandate to maximize the dissemination of United Nations information throughout the world the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was continuing to strengthen its system of depository libraries by designating new ones in new Member States. The library was also engaged in promoting cooperation between the libraries of the United Nations common system and establishing policies to that end. It was planning to set up a separate branch library to serve the Departments of Political Affairs and Peace-keeping Operations because the information provided by its legal and statistical service was extremely useful

(Mr. Vianello-Chiodo)

and there was a growing need to establish closer ties between those services and the Departments concerned.

7. As for strengthening the Publications Board as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 47/73 B, he had commissioned a report from an expert on publishing in the United Nations system (the Mandl Report). The report, which had been submitted in May 1993, contained a number of excellent suggestions which had been discussed in the Department. The Working Committee of the Publications Board had adopted the suggestions in principle. Their implementation together with the guidance the General Assembly would give on the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Publications Board relating to the elaboration of the United Nations publications policy (A/AC.198/1993/4) would help strengthen the role of the Publications Board and consequently the publications programme.

8. The fourth Division was the Promotion and External Relations Division which was responsible for developing advocacy policies, producing thematic information material in conjunction with substantive departments and other United Nations organizations, disseminating and exploiting information, liaising with non-governmental organizations, managing services for the public, organizing special events and directing United Nations information centres. During the preceding year the Division had carried out, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 47/73 B, information programmes on the following priority areas: peace-keeping, peacemaking, disarmament and conflict resolution, human rights - in particular in the context of the World Conference on Human Rights and the International Year for the World's Indigenous People - the anti-apartheid struggle, sustainable development, the information programme on Palestine, women's issues and information on Africa. The publication Africa Recovery had, for the second time, won the prestigious World Hunger Media Award. In 1993, the Division had produced a new edition of Basic Facts about the United Nations, a special edition of Notes for speakers on human rights and it was in the process of preparing a new booklet ("Answering Hostile Questions") intended to respond to some of the many unjustified criticisms made of the United Nations.

9. The NGO/Department of Public Information Annual Conference, in which more than 1,300 representatives of non-governmental organizations had participated, had dealt with social development as a new definition of security. The Promotion and External Relations Division had also organized the annual training programme for press, radio and television journalists from developing countries and for the first time a training programme for young diplomats which had previously been the responsibility of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. The main innovation had been the creation within the Division of a new Planning and Promotion Service which would be a focal point to enhance planning for major conferences and related information strategies, outreach programmes and coverage requirements.

10. In attempting to reach a wider public the Department had offered its services to publicly accessible databases (GEMNET, Federal News Service and Agorá) whilst keeping up the arrangements with Reuters. Provisions had been made to ensure the timely dissemination of information bulletins on significant events, press briefings and other information in English and French.

(Mr. Vianello-Chiodo)

11. With regard to United Nations information centres, a new centre would be set up in Sana'a, Yemen, and the Tehran centre, Islamic Republic of Iran, would be reopened. The capacity of centres in Bujumbura, Dar-es-Salaam and Dhaka would be enhanced. In accordance with the wishes of the Secretary-General and the German authorities a new information centre would be set up in Bonn in January 1994 with the financial support of the host Government. The three new United Nations information centres could be staffed through the redeployment of existing posts. The Department was also trying to fill the vacant Director posts in Copenhagen, Harare, Lusaka, Manila, Mexico, Nairobi and Sydney. Action had been taken to evaluate the current integration of certain information centres with United Nations Development Programme field offices. Increased support had been requested from some host Governments for centres in their countries and negotiations were under way in Washington and London with a view to obtaining more favourable terms for rental paid for office premises.

12. Since the Division was responsible not only for producing and disseminating information, but also for carrying out activities to exploit information and supervising information centres, it was better able to respond to the needs of its various audiences, be they the media, the general public, non-governmental organizations, United Nations associations or educational institutions which ensured the redissemination of information. The Division had also taken the initiative of systematically working with parliamentarians at the national level and in international forums. The Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Information had also undertaken to evaluate more systematically a series of activities of the Department of Public Information, which was an essential task.

13. Because of the recent decision to suspend guided tours, Headquarters could no longer be as open to the public. That decision would also prevent the Dag Hammarskjöld library from becoming a cultural centre as had been hoped. The Department would like to hear the views of the Committee on Information on how satisfactory arrangements could be devised to maintain both the security of the Headquarters building and the public's access to it.

14. Financial difficulties meant that choices must be made among multiplying priorities. The meetings planned for 1994 (the International Conference on Population and Development) and 1995 (the World Summit for Social Development, the fourth World Conference on Women, the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders and the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations) all constituted challenges which, with the support of the Committee on Information, the Department would be able to meet. The Department of Public Information's programme of work and proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995 (A/48/6 (sect. 24)) were in accordance with the Committee's recommendations as set forth in document A/48/21.

15. The time had come to end the inactivity in which the United Nations had been frozen since the cold war. It must be freed from that spiritual paralysis and an effort must be made to breathe new life into the vision which had guided the founders of the Organization 48 years before.

16. Mr. KONIK (Poland), Acting Chairman of the Bureau of the Committee on Information, introduced the Committee's report (A/48/21). The Committee had

(Mr. Konik, Poland)

decided, again by consensus, to recommend that the General Assembly should adopt draft resolution A, on information in the service of humanity, and draft resolution B, on United Nations public information policies and activities, contained in part IV of the report. The draft resolutions reflected the consensus reached by the Committee on the importance of the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, and of independence, pluralism and diversity in the media. The Committee recommended strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to improve the system of information and communication in developing countries and called on the General Assembly to provide full support for the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication. Draft resolution B sketched out the general framework for the future activities of the Department of Public Information.

17. At its fifteenth session, the Committee had continued its discussions of means of strengthening further the network of United Nations Information Centres and services, which were called upon to respond to an ever-increasing number of questions about the Organization's activities. The Committee had made clear and specific recommendations regarding the work of the Department. It had also decided, in view of the growing interest in its work, to recommend that the General Assembly should increase the Committee's membership from 80 to 83 and should accept the candidacies of Gabon and Israel.

18. He wished to express the Committee's gratitude to the Assistant Secretary-General for Information and to the Department of Public Information for their invariably cooperative attitude and for their untiring efforts to respond to requests for information. He also wished to thank the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Mansoor Suhail, of Pakistan, and the other members of the Bureau for their efforts to bring about consensus within the Committee. He also thanked the representatives of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China. He paid a tribute to the former Secretary of the Committee on Information, Mr. Masha, and welcomed its new Secretary, Mr. Gerhard Haensel.

19. Mr. LOPEZ OSPINA (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) recalled that, in 1989, UNESCO had adopted a new communication strategy aimed at encouraging the free flow of information, promoting its wider and better-balanced dissemination, and developing appropriate means of strengthening communication capacities in the developing countries. In order to implement the new strategy, a series of seminars had been organized, in cooperation with the United Nations Department of Public Information, with a view to promoting the development of a free and pluralistic press. The first seminar, held in the spring of 1991 at Windhoek (Namibia), had culminated in the adoption of the Declaration of Windhoek, currently recognized as a reference text by media professionals from all countries. At its twenty-sixth General Conference, UNESCO, which had endorsed the Declaration of Windhoek, had called for the establishment of 3 May as World Press Freedom Day, and the proposal had been approved in July 1993 by the Economic and Social Council. A second seminar had been held in October 1992 at Alma Alta, and UNESCO was currently preparing, with the Department of Public Information and UNDP, a third regional seminar to be held in Santiago, Chile, aimed at evaluating media trends in the region, identifying ways and means of fostering press freedom and developing independent and pluralistic media, while at the same time encouraging disadvantaged populations to participate in the processes of development and democratization

(Mr. Lopez Ospina, UNESCO)

by setting up their own media at the grass-roots level. The participants in the seminar would seek to identify projects likely to meet those goals. Another major component of the new information strategy was the Intergovernmental Programme for the Development of Communication which, at its recent fourteenth session, had approved some 50 new communication development projects at the international, regional and national levels. Funding for those projects from voluntary contributions totalled about 2.2 million dollars. That amount, however, would meet only 25 per cent of the needs of all those projects and the balance would have to be raised from bilateral sources. Currently, the Programme's special account had total funding of 3 million dollars. UNESCO hoped that at the twenty-seventh General Conference, which had just opened, contributions from Member States would make it possible to increase the funding of the special account to 6 million dollars for the 1994-1995 biennium.

20. UNESCO was still unwavering in its commitment to promote the free flow of information and its wider dissemination. It was concerned at the apparent disinclination of the industrialized countries to fund efforts to develop communication in the developing countries, at a time when an increasing number of the projects proposed in that area concerned countries that were undergoing democratization.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/C.4/48/L.1)

21. The CHAIRMAN announced that, after consultations with Conference Services, the Committee had been allocated four additional meetings. He proposed, therefore, that item 84 should be taken up from 8 to 11 November, item 85 from 15 to 19 November, item 86 at four meetings on 22 and 23 November and item 87 at four meetings on 24 and 26 November. The timetable for the organization of work (A/C.4/48/L.1) should be amended accordingly.

22. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
9th meeting
held on
Tuesday, 26 October 1993
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued)

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS

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A/C.4/48/SR.9
30 November 1993
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/48/21 and A/48/407)

1. Mr. BROUHNS (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that General Assembly resolution 59 (I), one of the first resolutions that had been unanimously adopted by the General Assembly, in December 1946, declared that freedom of information was a fundamental human right and an essential factor in the promotion of peace and progress. Freedom of the press and respect for the work of journalists were indispensable for the exercise of that right. He strongly condemned attacks against members of the press and paid homage to the memory of all journalists who had died in the performance of their professional duties.

2. The European Community and its member States welcomed the maintenance of unanimous support for the strengthening of the free flow of information and on the reduction of disparities existing between developed and developing countries in the field of information. The Twelve were prepared to cooperate with the developing countries and to seek the means for assisting the Department of Public Information in carrying out its task.

3. As a major contributor to the Organization's budget, the European Community and its member States hoped that the considerable resources allocated to the Department, in particular for the production of certain publications, would be managed efficiently and rationally. The resources allocated for the dissemination of information on apartheid would have to be reviewed as soon as democratic elections were held in South Africa, and the impact of the Department's information campaigns should be rigorously assessed. The discussions already begun on that issue should be continued in the Fourth Committee.

4. The Department played an important role in the dissemination of information on peace-keeping activities, and the European Community and its member States commended the Department's day-to-day coverage of the major peace-keeping activities during the past year. The Department should adopt, within existing resources, a high-profile communication strategy to correct the distorted image that certain private media gave of United Nations activities, using for that purpose all modern means of information and communication and giving priority to direct contacts with journalists. Moreover, the "information" component should be an integral part of planning.

5. Certain United Nations information centres should be made regional and serve several countries. The integration of individual United Nations offices would help to increase productivity and achieve economies of scale.

6. While they were aware of the need for rigorous security measures, the Twelve considered that the recent suspension of guided tours had come at a particularly inopportune time. They hoped that the Department would be able to resume the tours in the near future, particularly in view of the forthcoming celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

7. Mr. JARAMILLO (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the question of information, a key factor for political and economic power, was of great importance to the Group of 77, whose members fully supported freedom of opinion and freedom of the press, which were important for the strengthening of democracy and peace.

8. Because of their technological superiority, the developed countries held a virtual monopoly on information. The developing countries needed assistance to strengthen their communication capacities, which would enable them to ensure a more balanced exchange of information. The United Nations had a crucial role to play in that regard, and should endeavour to promote social responsibility on the part of the mass media.

9. The United Nations should widely disseminate its objectives and activities by all the means at its disposal. The Organization's renewed dynamism and its growing participation in the search for solutions to world problems since the end of the cold war had exposed it to severe criticism that went so far as to question its credibility. Through its activities, the Department of Public Information should improve the Organization's image in the eyes of the general public.

10. Programmes relating to information should be transparent and proportionate to the resources allocated to them. For the purpose of efficiency, the Group of 77 was prepared to hold a constructive debate on the evaluation of the Department's programmes. The reorganization of programmes in that area, like the reorganization currently in progress within the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) for the budget, should be carried out within the Committee on Information. In spite of the progress achieved in South Africa and the Middle East, the time had not yet come to discontinue the information programmes. The New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s also merited the Department's close attention.

11. The Group of 77 attached particular importance to United Nations publications and was surprised that the publication of Development Forum had been suspended without the involvement of the Committee on Information. He recalled the provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/73 B relating to publications and noted that publications could not be evaluated on the basis of commercial criteria, since the United Nations was not a profit-making organization. The press releases were an excellent way of publicizing the activities of the system. The Group of 77 was also concerned at the marginalization of questions relating to economic and social development in favour of questions relating to peace and security.

12. The information centres were an important means of disseminating information on United Nations activities, particularly in the developing countries. The process of integrating those centres with UNDP field offices in 18 countries had surprised many Member States. The Group of 77 feared that that integration policy might be harmful to the centres' public information activities in certain countries, and looked forward to the report that the Secretary-General would submit on the matter in accordance with the relevant draft resolution (A/48/21). It would be useful to have an explanation of the criteria for selecting the countries that would be affected by that process. The Group of 77 hoped that the information centres would retain their functional

(Mr. Jaramillo, Colombia)

and operational autonomy, and that efforts would be made to improve productivity, achieve economies of scale and project a unified image of the Organization.

13. The Group of 77 hoped that the decision to establish or reactivate information centres in the countries members of the Group of 77 would be implemented as soon as possible. The Group was surprised at the initiative to establish an information centre at Bonn, which had been put forward without giving the Committee on Information an opportunity to consider the question. The recommendations relating to information were contained in General Assembly resolutions, and any other step would constitute a violation of established rules.

14. With regard to the allocation of resources to the various centres, the Group of 77 reiterated the appeal, contained in paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 47/73 B, that the Secretary-General should study ways and means of redressing differences in that area. The Group of 77 hoped that the General Assembly would adopt the draft resolution in which the Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to rationalize the disbursement of available resources. It was important to continue to review the information costs borne by the Organization in each country, bearing in mind the resources at their disposal. The Group of 77 welcomed the contributions of certain States to the operation of those information centres.

15. With regard to the seven interim offices established in the republics of the former Soviet Union, the Fifth Committee had requested the Secretary-General to take into account the provisions of the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

16. The Group of 77 opposed the assignment of political functions to the resident coordinators. The United Nations was not a State; therefore, the coordinators could not assume the functions of political ambassadors.

17. As for the financing of the offices mentioned, the Group of 77 believed that it was for intergovernmental bodies to take a decision on the matter during the current session. In its view, the measures adopted should not be to the detriment of developing countries.

18. With regard to the extended bureau of the Committee on Information, the Group believed that it had an organizational function only. All substantive and programme decisions were the responsibility of the Fourth Committee, while financial questions were the responsibility of the Fifth Committee.

19. The Group of 77 commended UNESCO for its efforts, through its International Programme for the Development of Communications, to meet the growing needs of the developing countries in that field. It also welcomed cooperation between the Department of Public Information and UNESCO, particularly concerning the holding of regional seminars on independence of the press.

20. In conclusion, the Group of 77 was concerned by the delay in the implementation of certain General Assembly decisions and hoped that the Department would implement them as soon as possible.

21. Mr. RODRIGO (Sri Lanka) said that currently, what the United Nations was or was not doing in respect of controversial and fast-breaking developments throughout the world was attracting more media attention than ever, and its image, whether it evoked admiration of disdain, varied considerably according to the situation, as could be seen by consulting the newspapers in New York, Sri Lanka or anywhere else in the world. The important point was that there was no longer a sense of apathy about the United Nations.

22. The United Nations was in transition. Its action or inaction affected the lives of millions of people and the way in which it was perceived among the general public currently had a notable influence on the attitudes of Governments. Indeed, public opinion and government policy interacted, and the media were a point of linkage which, for better or for worse, had a powerful effect on both. The media had a direct and immediate impact on public reaction to United Nations actions. On the other hand, the message of the United Nations information system tended to move indirectly, and much more gradually.

23. Dissemination of accurate information, given the vast audience and the complexity of the issues at stake, was an enormous task, which the United Nations information system, if it relied on its own resources, would have difficulty in performing. It had no choice other than to work in close cooperation with the media, whether commercial, private or State. Good working relationships were vital, and they should be developed and maintained in such a way that the message could be understood and spread by other systems with a wider reach.

24. For the media, the United Nations was a fruitful source of material. Reports of its activities already reached a wider public than would otherwise have been possible for the Department of Public Information alone, for example. The challenge was to ensure that the coverage was informed, complete and fair and that it encouraged public faith in the United Nations. Any distortions or biased reporting would seem to reflect not only irresponsibility on the part of the media, but also the inability of the United Nations information system to work effectively with them. The media did not necessarily follow Government criteria; they were governed by a mixture of professional ethics and commercial compulsions. They sought to shape information to be attractive to the public, advertisers, shareholders, and so on. Therefore, the Committee should assess whether the United Nations information system as it currently functioned had taken full advantage of the spotlight now aimed at it, though that was not an easy task. A balanced image of the United Nations in all its complexity must be projected, and the United Nations system, for its part, might need to make an effort to meet the demands of the media.

25. United Nations Headquarters in New York was unique in housing one of the largest concentrations of media representatives in the world in a single building. But some of those representatives believed that United Nations information activities represented only "information of bureaucrats by bureaucrats for bureaucrats". It was thus evident that the approach of the Department of Public Information to the media was in great need of revamping. Ongoing exchanges and dialogue between the Organization and the media would be needed in order to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with reciprocal concessions and a periodic review of problems. His delegation, therefore, welcomed the suggestion to establish a small task force to look into all aspects

(Mr. Rodrigo, Sri Lanka)

of the relationship between the Department and media representatives accredited to the United Nations.

26. United Nations information centres must be promoted, giving priority to developing countries which had less well-developed information sources, particularly in the regions where the United Nations was conducting peace-keeping operations and other controversial programmes that required popular support as well as that of the host Government. The effectiveness of individual information centres must be analysed in cooperation with host Governments, taking into account in each case the particular range and scope of United Nations cooperation and involvement in the country concerned.

27. In conclusion, he supported the observations of the representative of Colombia, who had spoken on behalf of the Group of 77.

28. Mr. ZAIN (Malaysia) said that, in a world where peace, democratization and development were closely linked, and where political, security and development issues represented an increasingly important task for the United Nations, accurate and fair information was essential. Malaysia deplored the fact that, in many cases - for example the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf war, the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and United Nations peace-keeping operations - the Western media had tended to disseminate biased and irresponsible information, which imposed their own perceptions and misled the public. In the current age of new information technology, the general public should be able to count on information that portrayed the reality of various situations in a manner that encouraged understanding among the peoples of the world.

29. The changed situation which had emerged at the end of the cold war had given rise to new expectations, and the United Nations and its information system were faced with new challenges and expanded activities. The Department of Public Information had an important, if not critical, role to play within the Organization. Therefore, it must be strengthened.

30. There was an information revolution brewing, where the power of the media had taken on a force of its own in forming political realities and moulding public opinion. His delegation fully supported the efforts of the Committee on Information and other United Nations agencies entrusted with establishing a more just and effective world information and communication order. It would be advisable to bear in mind at all times the guiding principles of the Charter and to avoid leaving the responsibility for information in the hands of a small group, for otherwise, public trust might wane and with it the moral authority of the Charter. On the question of peace-keeping, his delegation hoped that the Department of Public Information would liaise closely with the Department of Peace-keeping Operations to ensure that all basic information pertaining to safety, well-being and organizational tasks were properly presented. Malaysia had endeavoured to play a role in those operations and had sent contingents to many different parts of the world. His delegation was aware of the dangers and risks to which peace-keeping forces were exposed and considered that countries contributing troops should be informed of all aspects of the various situations in a timely, well-defined and balanced way.

(Mr. Zain, Malaysia)

31. His delegation furthermore considered it necessary to seize the exceptional opportunity of the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995 to promote the Organization's many accomplishments and to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. It fully supported the observations and recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Information, and appreciated the recent contribution made by UNESCO.

32. Mr. OMER (Sudan) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Colombia on behalf of the Group of 77. It was necessary to implement the recommendations of the Committee on Information, which were essential for the creation of an impartial press, particularly with respect to developing countries. United Nations information centres played a very important role, particularly in the light of the many changes which had recently taken place at the international, regional and national levels. The rapid transmission of objective and reliable information, particularly in developing countries, had become one of the pillars of the new world information order, and it was necessary to promote justice in that sphere and to counter the influence of the developed countries.

33. It was of particular importance that the Department of Public Information should cover all activities relating to racial discrimination and the question of Palestine.

34. While the Secretary-General's report on questions relating to information (A/48/407) listed the numerous activities of the Department of Public Information, it did not analyse them and did not specify to what extent they had been successful or how they could be improved. It would be advisable to strengthen cooperation with the competent agencies in Africa and to grant them assistance. Radio was extremely important in Africa, as it was the most important form of contact that people had with the outside world. As a matter of urgency, the Department of Public Information should organize seminars and training courses in Africa, as it had done in other parts of the world. While it was true that the Department of Public Information and the competent United Nations agencies were doing a great deal in the fields of social development and the environment, it was important for the general public in developing countries to be better informed about those questions, for otherwise there could be no real development in those countries.

35. His delegation awaited with interest the report that the Secretary-General would present to the Committee on Information at its sixteenth session, dealing with ways to remedy the disparities, particularly in the area of support, in the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres. That report would be all the more relevant in the light of what the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information had said the previous day concerning the establishment of new centres, for example at Sana'a and the enhancement of the centres at Tehran, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka and Bujumbura.

36. His country, like the other developing countries, was the victim of biased information, for it lacked the modern information facilities and the experience which would enable it to face up to the large information networks which disseminated distorted information for political purposes, even if only by correcting such information vis-à-vis the public. Those information networks

(Mr. Omer, Sudan)

were alarmist and prone to exaggeration, saying that, for example, vaccination was ineffective only in Africa or that the regime in a given country was expansionist or totalitarian as long as it did not seek to emulate the Western model of democratization.

37. Information had become a commercial activity, a very powerful political tool which could be used to shape public opinion. The professional ethics necessary in such a field were lacking, and it was to be feared that certain press agencies were currently in the hands of very powerful secret services.

38. His country was being continually subjected to an iniquitous information campaign, because it persisted in seeking to take freely political, cultural and social decisions that were consistent with the interests of its community. The world media spread totally unfounded information, describing the Sudan as a country divided into a Muslim Arab north and an African Christian south, with conflict between the two being at the heart of the crisis in the south. Another example of such information was blaming the State if assistance did not reach the populations of the south for whom it was destined. Those same media had not mentioned the criminal acts perpetrated against the peoples of the south by the rebels, who were violating human rights, shooting down civilian aircraft, stealing from cattle-breeders whose children were abducted and recruited by force, or killing United Nations workers.

39. The Sudan therefore hoped that the United Nations would play a pioneering role in the field of information and would become a forum where credibility and equality reigned, without the disparities which characterized current flows of information. The United Nations should obtain its information from the source and then disseminate it widely and promptly. It was inadmissible that a charity organization should publish information on a humanitarian situation, for example on flows of refugees or aid activities, before the competent agencies of the United Nations. United Nations personnel were impartial and well-intentioned, but that was not true of all those who worked for non-governmental organizations; some of the individuals concerned were in thrall to the false information circulating in the same groups that had sent them to the Sudan.

40. It was important that the Department of Public Information should explain more clearly the goals of the Organization, which was working for the benefit of Member States in regard to the settlement of conflicts and the maintenance of international peace and security. The United Nations information centres should be able to compete with the large international media operations.

41. His country was convinced of the importance of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. It was, however, necessary to show responsibility in exercising those rights, and not to incite social upheaval, particularly in developing countries, which were easily influenced. It was therefore essential, in the interests of the peoples concerned, to bring under control the revolutionary technique of transmitting televised broadcasts by satellite. The Sudan had recently adopted a law relating to the press. A press council had been created to ensure that journalists respected professional ethics. In fact it was the responsibility of the State to protect society, a responsibility it should not evade on the pretext of respecting freedom of expression or individual freedom.

REQUESTS FOR HEARINGS

42. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he had received two communications containing requests for hearings pertaining to agenda item 38, "Elimination of apartheid and establishment of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa". In accordance with the usual practice, he suggested that those communications should be circulated as documents of the Committee and examined at a later session.

43. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.